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October 5, 2015

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Cynthia A. Harding, M.P.H.
              Interim Director

SUBJECT: **PUBLIC HEALTH STRIKE TEAM RESPONSE TO THE BUTTE FIRE IN CALAVERAS COUNTY**

This is to provide you with information about the response of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health to a mutual aid request from Calaveras County to assist with the Butte Fire.

Background

The Butte Fire in Amador and Calaveras Counties started on September 9, 2015. It burned 70,868 acres, including 475 residences, before being declared contained on October 1, 2015. As the fire had burned many structures, assessments of public health threats for the impacted properties were required.

On September 18, 2015, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health received a request from the California Office of Emergency Services for needed assistance to Calaveras County due to the Butte Fire. The Los Angeles County Environmental Health Field Assessment Strike Team (EHFAST) deployed a five-member team on September 21, 2015 to Calaveras County with the mission of conducting environmental hazard assessments to prevent injury and illness to the public. This was the first deployment of the EHFAST in response to a mutual aid request.

In times of major disasters and emergencies, smaller counties, such as Calaveras, request and depend on rapid, professional, and expert assistance from larger counties, such as Los Angeles. Police and fire departments typically receive and respond to mutual aid requests. For major fires, though, public health expertise is necessary to perform the types of specialized assessments of property, water resources, and septic systems that must be completed before residents can access their properties post-disaster. By deploying the EHFAST to Calaveras County, the capacity of their workforce to perform environmental health assessments was greatly increased, allowing faster re-entrance to properties by residents.

DPH Response

Over a ten day period beginning September 21, 2015, the five members of the EHFAST, in conjunction with Calaveras County and other partners, completed 758 site hazard assessments without incident. This included assessments for exposed drinking water wells and compromised septic tanks, which can lead to ground water contamination; residual household chemicals, such as cleaners, petroleum products, and pesticides, which can be toxic; and damaged propane tanks and unstable ammunition, which can cause severe injury or death when ignited. On October 1, 2015, 95% of the Calaveras County burn sites had been inspected. With the mission complete, the EHFAST de-mobilized and returned to Los Angeles County.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please let me know.

CAH:ld

Attachment

c: Interim Chief Executive Officer
        Interim County Counsel
        Acting Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors

Public Health Strike Team Response to the Butte Fire in Calaveras County

The Los Angeles County Environmental Health Field Assessment Strike Team deployed a five-member team from September 21 to October 1, 2015 to Calaveras County in response to a mutual aid request to assist with the Butte Fire. The photos presented here show the conditions after the fire and the activities of the team.

Photo 1: A family reoccupying property after their home was completely destroyed by fire.

Photo 2: A garage consumed by fire, leaving behind ash, melted metal and rubber, and fuel tanks.

Photo 3: A water tank demolished by the fire.

Photo 4: The Los Angeles County Public Health Strike Team performing a property hazard assessment.